

# William Jennifer

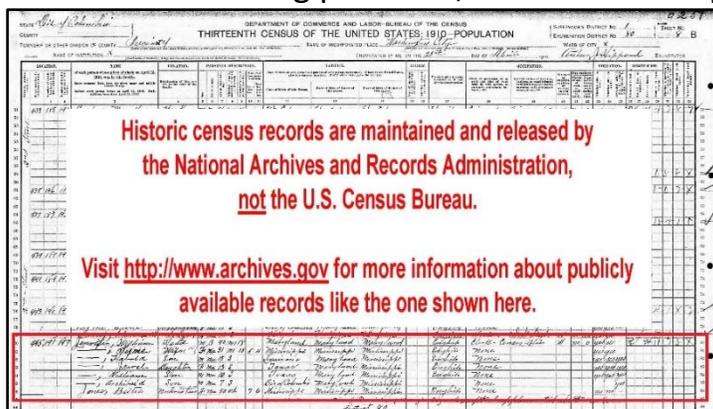
Teacher, Statistician, Census Supervisor

The U.S. Census Bureau is proud of its history of continually evolving to ensure an accurate count of the people of the United States. To accomplish this, the Census Bureau has long embraced the hiring of a diverse workforce representative of local communities and the people who were a part of the neighborhoods that they counted. For this reason, census work was often one of the few government jobs open to minorities. Beginning with the 1870 Census (the first after the abolition of slavery), the Census Bureau began hiring African Americans as enumerators and data processors. With the creation of a permanent Census Bureau in 1902, black workers and statisticians found an environment with an inclusiveness far greater than many contemporary institutions.



The Colored American (Washington, DC) March 29, 1902.

William Jennifer was born in 1870 in Cambridge, Maryland. His parents, James and Henrietta, moved the family to the deep South while William was still a small child and he spent much of his childhood in Chotard, Mississippi. He entered African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church as a teen and was a devout and active member his whole life. William subsequently used a combination of church and teaching positions, which were frequently intertwined, to work his way up to principal



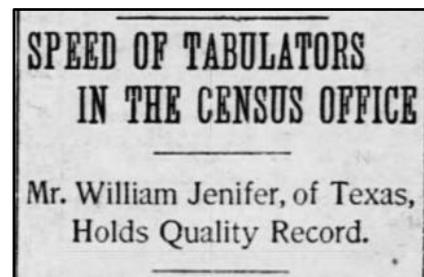
Historic census records are maintained and released by the National Archives and Records Administration, not the U.S. Census Bureau.

Visit <http://www.archives.gov> for more information about publicly available records like the one shown here.

William and his family's 1910 Census.

With his increasingly notable profile a school in Milford, Texas, recruited William as principal, where his wife, Syme, would also teach. There he also became active in the Colored Teachers' County Association and the Republican Party. William endeavored to use his political connections to get a job, such as postmaster in 1897, or ambassador to Haiti in 1900. However with the winding down of the patronage system and the increase in testing requirements for federal jobs, he traveled to New Orleans in 1900 to take the clerkship test for the Twelfth Census of the United States. He passed with a notably high average and secured the post. With his new job in hand, William and his family moved to Washington, D.C., where they flourished in their new environment. Both Syme and William became highly active in the social fabric of the city as well as the civil rights movement, and frequently worked and socialized with some of the most notable names in the movement at the time, such as Booker T. Washington and Benjamin O. Davis Sr. The Census Bureau was also a natural fit for William, and within two years he was celebrated as one of the best clerks in the building.

of the Delhi, Louisiana, Normal School and Agricultural Institute in 1889. It was while working at Dehli that he met and married fellow teacher Syme Louisa Jones, herself a graduate of Mount Herman Seminary in her hometown of Clinton, MS. In addition to being a highly successful teacher and principal, William also briefly ran a newspaper in Dehli called *The Planet*.



The Washington Times  
(Washington, DC) March 13, 1902.



A portrait of William in WEB DuBois's bronze medal winning booth at the 1900 Paris Exposition. DuBois, who also wrote a report for the 1900 Census, used statistics to show how Black Americans were achieving success despite setbacks and stereotypes.

Library of Congress,  
<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppmsca.33932>

Despite his successes, like the other clerks computing the data for the 1900 Census William's temporary appointment ended in 1902. However, upon learning of his pending dismissal, President Theodore Roosevelt intervened on his behalf to ensure that William became a part of the newly-established permanent Census Bureau. This was a testament to William's skill as there were only 624 permanent employees.

As the Census Bureau responsibilities expanded beyond the decennial census, William worked on several surveys and topics. In both 1906 and 1916, William drew upon his own religious background while serving as a special agent for the Census Bureau's Censuses of Religious Bodies, which counted congregations and the services they provided, not the religion(s) of individuals. William also worked on the 1910 Census, and earned praise from all quarters for the 1915 Bulletin #129 "Negroes in the United States," which he compiled along with Charles E. Hall and Robert Pelham. Contemporary statisticians and civil rights activists recognized

the 1915 report as an important document for how it identified and attempted to address inaccurate historical data on Black population, and for how the authors used statistics to show Black progress in agriculture, social outreach and population gains. Throughout his time at the Census Bureau William also continued his academic advancement. He joined the medical department at Howard University in 1903, however his studies were interrupted after three years by his travels for the 1906 Census of Religious Bodies. William later received an honorary Doctor of Philosophy from Paul Quinn College at Waco, Texas in 1907.

In addition to his important work as a statistician, William also broke barriers as one of the first black supervisors when he became a Section Chief in the Division of Revision and Results in 1914. In 1916, William transferred from the Census Bureau to the Department of Labor where he was assigned to supervise welfare and development in Michigan. Soon after the start of prohibition William transferred to the Internal Revenue Service where he worked as a Narcotic Squad Officer and Prohibition Officer. In 1920, William resigned from federal service and returned to Michigan where he worked in state and local government in Lansing and Detroit. William used statistics to identify and find the best ways to provide social and government outreach to underserved populations.



**SYME L. JENNIFER**

*Evening Star* (Washington, DC)  
September 2, 1970.

Throughout their entire lives, William and Syme dedicated themselves towards the advancement of civil rights. In addition to their decades of work in the AME, which was a major force in the civil rights movement, William and Syme traveled throughout the United States giving talks at several social and religious organizations on various topics related to the advancement of the Black population. Later in her life, Syme also worked as a census clerk and helped her son found and run a business school aimed at preparing black students for government clerkships and secretarial work. Following his work in Michigan, William returned to the Washington, DC area where he passed away on March 25, 1939. We are grateful for William's service to the U.S. Census Bureau, our nation, and his community.



**WILLIAM JENNIFER**

*Detroit Free Press* (Detroit, MI)  
November 11, 1918.